

Nicknames: Groundhog tick, Packard tick



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The **woodchuck tick**, *Ixodes cookei*, can be found east of the Rocky Mountains into New England and southeast Canada. The tick mostly feeds on rodents and medium-sized mammals, especially groundhogs and skunks. It will feed on a variety of animals including humans. This tick can transmit Powassan virus.

### Where in the United States is the woodchuck tick found?

Woodchuck ticks may be present anywhere east of the Rocky Mountains, but they are especially common in New England, the upper Midwest, and in southern areas of Canada.

### What does the woodchuck tick look like?

An adult woodchuck tick is about the size of a sesame seed and has a tan body with a reddish-tan plate on its back behind its head. Nymphs and larvae are a lighter tan color and are much smaller than adults.

### What are the hosts of the woodchuck tick?

Woodchuck ticks feed on small mammals such as skunks, raccoons and woodchucks. Woodchuck tick larvae, nymphs, and adults will readily bite humans and dogs.

### When is the woodchuck tick most active?

In the Northeast and Upper Midwest, woodchuck ticks become active in the spring and remain a nuisance through mid-August, with peak activity occurring during late June.

### What is the ideal habitat of woodchuck ticks?

Woodchuck ticks may be found in brushy areas and along trails bordered by tall grass or weeds. They are also common in unused human dwellings since these environments are nesting places for small mammals.

### What diseases can woodchuck ticks carry?

In the eastern United States and southern Canada, the woodchuck tick is recognized for its role in the transmission of a rare but serious disease known as Powassan virus. This disease was first identified in 1958 and named after Powassan, Ontario, the town where it was discovered. Powassan virus is an **arbovirus (arthropod borne virus)**, which means that it is spread to susceptible hosts by blood-feeding arthropods. Only one illness due to Powassan virus has ever been reported in Vermont.

### How do you prevent tick bites?

While outdoors:

- As much as possible, avoid high grass and bushy areas; stay on hiking trails.
- Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts to minimize skin exposure to ticks.
- Tuck your pants into your socks to form a barrier to tick attachment.
- Wear light-colored clothing to help see ticks on your clothing.

- Check for ticks, looking particularly for what may look like nothing more than a new freckle or speck of dirt, and remove ticks promptly.
- Use an effective tick repellent on your skin or on your clothing. There are several repellents that are effective against ticks. For an up-to-date list of EPA registered products, see <http://cfpub.epa.gov/opprpref/insect/>. Repellents should not be used on infants under 2 months of age. Read the label carefully and use according to the recommendations.
- Permethrin is an insecticide that can be applied to clothing or gear. If you spend a lot of time in tick habitat, wearing permethrin-treated clothing can be very effective at reducing your exposure to ticks

After you come inside:

- Check your or your child's body for ticks, and remove them promptly. Pay special attention to the head, armpits, and groin area.
- Examine clothing and gear for ticks. Placing your clothes in a hot dryer for 60 minutes will kill any ticks that may be clinging to the fabric.
- Check your pets for ticks as well. Consult your veterinarian for advice on choosing effective tick repellents for your pets.
- Showering within a few hours of coming inside can also reduce your risk of getting a tick bite.

### How do you remove ticks?

Try to remove the tick as soon as you discover it because prompt removal can prevent transmission of tick-borne diseases.

#### **To safely remove ticks:**

1. Use fine-tipped tweezers and firmly grasp the tick close to the skin. Avoid touching the tick with your bare hands
2. With a steady motion, pull straight up until all parts of the tick are removed. Do not twist or jerk the tick. Do not be alarmed if the tick's mouthparts remain in the skin. Once the mouthparts are removed from the rest of the tick, it can no longer transmit disease-causing bacteria.

**DO NOT** use petroleum jelly, a hot match, nail polish, or other products to remove a tick. These methods are ineffective.

#### **Thoroughly wash your hands and the bite area**

After removing the tick, wash your hands with soap and water or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available. Clean the tick bite with soap and water or use an antiseptic such as iodine scrub or rubbing alcohol.